

## Baldwin, Frank, Polis, Nadler, Honda, Quigley Seek to End Discrimination for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Binational Families

Tuesday, 09 February 2010

Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Congressmen Barney Frank (D-MA), Jared Polis (D-CO), Jerrold Nadler (D-NY), Mike Honda (D-CA), and Mike Quigley (D-IL), joined by more than 50 Members of the LGBT Equality Caucus, the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus have sent a letter to President Obama and House and Senate leaders expressing their strong support for a comprehensive immigration reform bill that would end discrimination against LGBT binational families.

"There is simply no place for discrimination in America," said Congresswoman Baldwin. "LGBT families are being torn apart by inequitable immigration laws that deny same sex married couples and domestic partners the same rights and obligations as their married heterosexual neighbors. As we tackle comprehensive immigration reform, it's imperative that we end discriminatory laws that hurt couples, their children and extended families, and their communities and employers," Baldwin said.

"We are a nation of immigrants and, as a result, our diversity is our greatest strength," said Congressman Polis. "Unfortunately, our out-dated immigration system contains laws that discriminate against LGBT families and hinder our economy, our diversity, and our status as a beacon of hope and liberty to people across the world. To be truly comprehensive and achieve real, long-lasting reform, we must provide all domestic partners and married couples the same rights and obligations in any immigration legislation," Polis said.

"Comprehensive immigration reform will only be truly comprehensive if it includes LGBT families," said Congressman Nadler. "We must take the government out of the businesses of singling out LGBT families for discriminatory treatment and live up to our democratic ideal of equality under the law. I join my colleagues in calling on Congress and the White House to include the Uniting American Families Act, which I have introduced in every Congress since 2000, in any immigration reform legislation and end discrimination against binational LGBT families," Nadler said.

"As Vice Chair of the Equality Caucus, I am excited to support the Caucus's call for comprehensive immigration reform," said Congressman Honda. "Last June, I included same-sex permanent partners in my Reuniting Families Act, H.R. 2709, because the reunification of all families must be the cornerstone of our immigration policy. That the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, Black Caucus, and Progressive Caucus, stand beside the Asian Caucus, which I chair, in this call for reform reminds me of the diversity of communities affected by our broken immigration system. The time to help our economy, reunite our families, all our families, and to live up to our values as a nation of immigrants is now," Honda said.

"It saddens me to think that the struggle for immigration reform, a movement based on the fundamental principles of equality and the decent treatment of every human being, could push on without including LGBT families," said Congressman Quigley. "If we are to truly consider a proposal deemed 'comprehensive,' we must include everyone. The beauty of America is that somewhere in each of our lineages, someone made the choice to come here, to a country built on fairness and justice. We must continue to honor that tradition not just for some, but for all," Quigley said.

Under current law, LGBT Americans are unable to sponsor their spouses or partners for legal residency in the U.S. and, as a result, tens of thousands of binational families are either living separately, facing imminent separation, or have left the U.S. entirely in order to remain together. This policy often separates children from a parent, causes businesses to lose valuable employees, and forces state, local and the federal government to lose hardworking taxpayers.

A California mother of two who has been with her American citizen partner for 23 years, Shirley Tan, was detained by

immigration and faces future deportation. Ms. Tan, who is also the primary caregiver for her partner's elderly mother, faces the very real possibility of being torn away from her family unless immigration reform includes LGBT couples, too.

In Wisconsin, a valued language teacher, Lucie Ferrari, was forced to leave the country causing her American partner (they are legally married in Canada) to give up her job as a neighborhood organizer and leave as well, so they could be together.

In Minnesota, an American citizen is currently considering closing her small business — which generates more than one million dollars annually — so that she can leave the country in order to be with her Malaysian partner.

In Vermont, a physician who worked with wounded troops at a local Veterans Administration medical facility recently quit his job, and moved to a part-time position elsewhere, so he will be able to travel frequently to South America to be with his partner.

Each of these stories is heart-wrenching and damaging to many, many lives and, unfortunately, all too common. Every day, loving, hard-working families are torn apart because of discriminatory immigration laws.

“Passage of immigration reform will require every family standing with their neighbors and loved ones to work for change,” said Rachel B. Tiven, Executive Director of Immigration Equality, a national organization that works to end discrimination in U.S. immigration law. “The LGBT Equality Caucus’s letter signals that our champions in Congress, and the LGBT community, are ready to work for passage of reform that includes all families, including LGBT families. There are more than 36,000 lesbian and gay binational families counting on us to get this work done. With the help of champions like Congresswoman Baldwin, Congressmen Frank, Polis, Nadler, Honda, and Quigley and the other members of the LGBT Equality Caucus, we can do just that,” Tiven said.

The Members call on President Obama, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Chair of the Senate Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees and Border Security, Chuck Schumer, and Chair of the House Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security, and International Law, Zoe Lofgren, to include the Uniting American Families Act (H.R. 1024/S. 424) in any comprehensive immigration reform legislation.

A copy of the letter follows.

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February 2, 2010

The Honorable Barack Obama

President of the United States of America

The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW

Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate  
522 Hart Senate Office Bldg  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives  
H-232, U.S. Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees and Border Security  
313 Hart Senate Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Zoe Lofgren  
Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security, and International Law  
102 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear President Obama, Majority Leader Reid, Speaker Pelosi, Chairman Schumer, and Chairwoman Lofgren:

As members of the Congressional LGBT Equality Caucus, we are writing to express our strong support for a comprehensive immigration reform bill which would end discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) binational families. We urge Congress to include the Uniting American Families Act (H.R. 1024/S. 424) in any comprehensive immigration reform legislation.

Currently, U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents may sponsor their spouses (and other immediate family members) for immigration purposes. But, same-sex partners committed to spending their lives together are not recognized as “families” under U.S. immigration law and thus do not have this same right. As a result, tens of thousands of binational families are either already living separately, face imminent separation, or have left the U.S. entirely in order to remain together. This is unacceptable, and we believe comprehensive immigration reform legislation must include a strong family reunification component inclusive of LGBT families.

According to 2000 census data compiled by the Williams Institute, an estimated 36,000 LGBT binational families are

impacted by the inability to sponsor their partners for residency, and nearly half of those (47 percent) are raising children. Our existing, discriminatory immigration laws hurt not only those individuals, but their extended families, communities, and employers, as well. Not only would an inclusive family reunification provision strengthen American families, it would bolster the competitiveness of businesses in the U.S. by allowing corporations to attract, employ, and retain the very best talent from across the globe. Indeed, the U.S. lags behind 19 countries that already recognize same-sex couples for immigration purposes, including the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, France, and Germany.

In truth, no immigration reform bill can be called “comprehensive” unless it includes all Americans, including those who are LGBT. This is recognized in the Reuniting Families Act (H.R. 2709), which includes LGBT families in addressing the broader immigration problem of family unification.

We urge you to include LGBT binational families in comprehensive immigration reform legislation. No one should be forced to choose between the person they love and the country they call home. It is time that our immigration laws kept families together instead of tearing them apart.

Sincerely,

Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Congressmen Barney Frank (D- MA), Jared Polis (D-CO), Jerrold Nadler (D-NY), Mike Honda (D-CA), and Mike Quigley (D-IL), et. al.